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RECOVERY EXPERTS IN V CORPS' 1ST ARMORED DIVISION GET DOWN AND DIRTY IN TRAINING, COMPETITION

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BAGHDAD, Iraq – Who here is the best at getting stuck stuff unstuck?



SPC JEANINE KINVILLE

Spc. James Fasthorse, a light wheeled vehicle mechanic (left) and his partner, Pfc. Michael Wilson, a quartermaster and chemical repair specialist, prepare to tow a truck from a mire pit during the recovery academy competition conducted by the 123rd Main Support Battalion of V Corps' 1st Armored Division May 21 at Baghdad International Airport. The Soldiers, both with E Company, 123rd MSB, came away with top honors in the event.

That's the question that instructors and students tackled at the service academy competition conducted by the 123rd Main Support Battalion of V Corps' 1st Armored Division at Baghdad International Airport May 21.

The competition capped a week of vehicle recovery training for the academy's students, providing a test of skill and speed for two-Soldier teams from the battalion's B, C, D and E Companies.

"This last day of the class is the physical competition portion that demonstrates what the students learned in the classroom and how well they do hands-on in all three of the events," said Sgt. Jason Williams, senior NCO for C Company's recovery section

and the academy's organizer. Williams is also the primary instructor for the battalion's four-soldier vehicle recovery team.

That team is often specifically requested when there's a sticky recovery mission to take on, said 1st Lt. Evnan Rodriguez, the C Company maintenance support platoon leader. "They have conducted over 200 missions with the Marines, the 82nd Airborne Division and other units around (the Baghdad airport). My guys have taken fire and pulled casualties out of vehicles."

The weeklong training covered preventive maintenance and service checks for 5-ton and Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Trucks. Students learned to tow disabled vehicles and conduct block and tackle -- a rigging procedure that lets students know how much pull they will need to turn a vehicle from its side with a HEMTT.

"If we don't do maintenance on our vehicles, it's not just our lives. Other people depend on us to take them out of 'the zone,'" said Spc. Alexander Trujillo, vehicle recovery team instructor and HEMTT operator.

The competition that followed the training sessions was divided into three events.

The first event is the mire pit. A truck is submerged in water and stuck in mud with two Soldiers role-playing as casualties inside, said Rodriguez. The team has to recover the wounded troops before towing the vehicle out with a five-ton wrecker.

The next event was using a HEMTT's onboard retrieval system to tow a disabled five-ton truck, said Spc. Edward Saks, the recovery team's 5-ton driver.

The final event involved extracting two “casualties” from a 5-ton and hooking up a tow bar to another disabled 5-ton.

There were some difficulties, but Spc. Daniel Alvarado, an instructor and tracked vehicle mechanic for C Company said, “We did our best and tried to communicate with each other. It’s a great training class and a great morale booster.”

The Soldiers role-playing as casualties added realism to the competition, and Combat Lifesaver skills were combined with all the tasks.

“When you throw in the first aid, it keeps the recovery personnel thinking in two different directions at once,” Williams said.

When the mud cleared, Pfc. Michael Wilson and Spc. James Fasthorse of E Company took away the day’s title as best recovery team.

More important than the accolades, though, was that all the student competitors learned something at the academy.

“This relates to everyone out there,” said Rodriguez. “Every vehicle that they recover is another vehicle they can use to accomplish the battalion’s mission.”

